

Illinois Association of Area Agencies on Aging

Testimony

IDOA Solutions Event: Older Americans Act

Wednesday, July 6, 2005

Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library

Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) have the primary task of planning and coordinating services and programs for older people with a regional focus. Our efforts revolve around providing the most appropriate services in the least restrictive environment. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Illinois Association of Area Agencies on Aging (IAA) and to share our issues and concerns. It is time to take a critical look at the services and resources available to meet the needs of the current and future aging population. The rapid increase in the aging populations will cause considerable strain on services to older adults. Few communities are prepared for this increase.

IAA supports the establishment of a new title to the OAA which would support AAAs aging programs to assist county and city governments across the nation to proactively prepare for the aging of the baby boomers.

Supportive services such as transportation, senior centers and services supporting caregivers save money and delay unnecessary placement of individuals in nursing homes. Funding has not kept pace with population growth and these services are at risk. Aging policy needs to recognize that remaining at home is the preference of older adults and community based supportive services are more cost effective than institutional care. Illinois provides more funding for home delivered meals than the Older Americans Act. This indicates that the demand for home delivered meals is far higher than the OAA appropriations. Even with Illinois identifying funds, most people only receive one meal a day five days a week when we usually have three meals per day seven days per week. The home delivered meals nutrition component of the OAA should be funded at twice the current levels to assure that people receive basic nutrition.

IAA supports raising the authorized funding levels of all the titles of the Older Americans Act by at least 25 percent above the FY 2005 appropriated funding levels over five years except for Title III Part E which should be authorized at \$250 million.

IAA also supports allowing the maximum amount of flexibility in the allocation of resources and the provision of services under Title III of the Older Americans Act in order for AAAs aging programs to most efficiently and effectively meet the growth.

The Aging Network's role as the Coordinated Point of Entry must be developed and strengthened.

I4A supports the creation of a new title that would permanently establish authorized Aging and Disability Resources Centers within every service area in the nation.

The prevalence of diseases has increased in the United States. For example, the number of people with diabetes in the United States has nearly doubled in the past decade, an estimated 10 million adults suffer from asthma and the number of cases of obesity in this nation has increased more than 50 percent over the past two decades. Simple as it may seem, promoting healthy lifestyles will not only increase a person's quality of life but also reduce acute or chronic care costs. It is possible for Older Americans Act Nutrition Programs (Congregate and Home Delivered Meals programs) support a wide number of service strategies to help people change their lives at any age. The combination of Health Promotion programs with Nutrition Services should have a variety of approaches, provided where older persons go, and should directly pay for meals and educational and informational programs on healthy lifestyles. It also should be used to equip and fund a variety of fitness programs in all communities.

I4A supports adjusting the authorization level of \$50 million for the Title III D program and proposes that \$10 million of the appropriation be set aside to pilot, through the AAAs, a community-based collaborative between local aging and healthcare providers to promote disease prevention services.

Family Caregivers are providing approximately 80% of community based services. The National Family Caregiver Program has been a lifesaver for many caregivers by creating and increasing information for caregivers, respite care, counseling, support groups, and training.

I4A supports expanding Title III E to allow agencies to serve grandparents and older adults who are providing care to adult children with disabilities. Also expand the definition of "kinship" in the National Family Caregiver Support Program to include non-blood relationships.

Transportation plays a critical role for older adults in providing access to medical and health care and other community services. In many communities transportation services and resources are fragmented, unused, or altogether unavailable. Transportation services should be seamless, comprehensive, and accessible to those who rely on them. For older adults, transportation within and between our communities should be as available, responsive, comprehensive and as affordable as possible.

I4A supports the inclusion of statutory language in the Older Americans Act that increases support to the Aging Network to promote senior mobility and to facilitate coordination of human services transportation.

Abuse, exploitation and neglect are common occurrences for far too many of today's older adults and this problem will only be exacerbated by the rapid growth of the aging population over the next decade.

I4A supports increasing the authorization of Title VII provisions and services to enhance the Aging Network's capacity to increase training of law enforcement officials and medical staff, broaden public education and community involvement campaigns, and facilitate coordination among all professionals and volunteers involved with the prevention, detection, intervention and treatment of abuse and neglect of vulnerable older adults.

The Title V, Workforce Investment Act programs and all federal employment programs should be coordinated to best promote and support the recruitment, training and retention of the growing ranks of older adults who wish to remain employed.

I4A supports the inclusion of a provision under Title V requiring a comprehensive study of current and future senior employment needs.

Over the next ten years, the Aging Network is forecasted to lose over a third of its local leaders as a result of retirement, attrition and other factors. Given the increased demographic demands on aging services in the next ten to twenty years, it is crucial that a pool of highly trained, effective leaders remain available to continue the critical work of AAAs and the local aging network.

I4A supports creating a national education and training program for AAA and Title VI Directors and aspiring Directors under Title IV that would reinforce and broaden the capacity of Aging Network leaders.

We must address today's demands along with future needs by dedicating resources, strengthening the existing network and coordinating efforts that allow us to provide the best services for our country's older adults. Thank you for the opportunity to share our vision of the aging network.

Joy Paeth
President I4A
(618) 222-2561